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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relocation of Athabasca University, an open-access, distance education institution, from Edmonton to Athabasca, Alberta, Canada, and the effect of that move on the library. Factors that helped make the move successful are discussed, including the 5-year institutional planning process; a government grant for the purchase of materials, hiring of staff, and implementation of automated procedures in technical services; the introduction of automation for serials and cataloging; and the supportive attitude of new staff members. Two major changes resulting from the move that will affect the library's services to students include: the development of the basic undergraduate collection, which will also lead to the implementation of a bibliographic instruction program; and the acquisition of automation for the public service area, which will ultimately include the installation of an on-line public catalog and circulation system. It is concluded that, although a successful move was ensured by advance planning for relocation, the three factors of resources, technology, and staff not only helped to facilitate the move but also set the stage for the library to become more active in offering its services to students. (Author/KM)

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ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COMES OF AGE -

A CASE STUDY OF PLANNING FOR AND COPING WITH CHANGE

PATRICIA J. APPAVOO

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

Paper presented at OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARY SERVICES CONFERENCE,
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ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

I. INTRODUCTION

Athabasca University is an open access distance education institution situated in Athabasca, Alberta. There are 12,000 student course registrations (about 2,500 fte.) and degrees are offered in Arts and Science and in Business Administration. Athabasca is a small community of 2,500 people serving the needs of the surrounding agricultural and oil exploration activities. The town is 150 km. (90 miles) from Edmonton, the capital of the province of Alberta. The University was established in 1970 and survived, in rented quarters in Edmonton, a tentative existence, for its first ten years. Despite its sometimes insecure status, the university was granted degree granting status in 1978 and with the increasing number of registrations demonstrated that there was a need for this mode of university education in Alberta and, indeed, in Canada.

In 1980, the Government of Alberta announced the relocation of Athabasca University from its temporary quarters in Edmonton to permanent quarters in Athabasca. Planning and organizing the relocation took up most of the next five years. A new, permanent facility was built to house the university academic and service staff and functions, and arrangements were made to move those staff members who agreed to relocate and to recruit new staff to replace those who chose not to relocate. Throughout the 5 year period of the relocation many decisions were made about the functioning of the university out of the Athabasca location which affected the future direction of the institution. This paper will examine the effect of that relocation on only one of the service departments of the university - the library.

The first librarian of Athabasca University was appointed in 1973. From the university's beginnings until the decision to relocate to Athabasca, the library was

developed in an essentially conservative manner. In the Athabasca University Annual Report 1976 the library was described in the following way:

> Athabasca University is an experiment in distance education. Part of the overall experiment is the library which functions primarily as an information service for the staff of the University who prepare the instructional materials sent out to the students. This service is in some respects similar to that provided by libraries in any academic setting. In other respects the service differs so substantially in form and degree that our Library is more accurately described as a Special Library rather than an academic one.

Acquisitions were limited to materials required for course development and production and standard reference materials. Materials cited on supplementary reading lists for Athabasca University courses were also acquired. The library began to build an in-depth collection in the literature of distance and innovative education.

The library's holdings did not begin to meet the needs of the faculty so the library staff served as facilitators between the staff and other information sources. Those information sources were found at the University of Alberta Libraries and the Edmonton Public Library. With these large, inclusive library collections close at hand it did not seem necessary to build up a comprehensive undergraduate library.

Service to students was also conservative in nature for many years. Students were requested to use their local library services as a first resource before approaching Athabasca University library for assistance. Such a policy made sense for students in the larger urban communities with public libraries and sometimes community college libraries. It was, however, far too restrictive for students in smaller communities where public libraries either did not exist or had small collections for popular reading.

In 1979 a "Task Force to Examine the Role and Development of the University Library" was established to

formulate medium and long range planning objectives. The Task Force recommended, among other things, that the library continue to take a conservative approach to building up the collection but that students be encouraged to use the library as a first resource for their course needs. To facilitate this recommendation it was decided that students should be allowed (even encouraged) to phone the library collect with their requests. The postage costs of material sent out to students were also absorbed by Athabasca University.

Aside from the basic philosophy which favoured a small, special library, the temporary quarters occupied by the university in Edmonton also did not lend themselves to rapid expansion of the collection. As long as the location was temporary there was little incentive to invest money in more permanent space for the library.

The decision to relocate the university to Athabasca had an important effect on the growth of the Library. One of the major points made by the many opponents of relocation was the inadequate library resources available in Athabasca. This inadequacy applied equally to the local public library and to the existing Athabasca University collection once it was removed from easy access to the University of Alberta Libraries. The result of this criticism was the decision on the part of the government to provide special funding to build up an undergraduate library collection and the inclusion of substantial library space in the architectural plans of the new permanent building.

In Athabasca University today we have a library large enough to hold 100,000 volumes, 1,000 periodical titles and 500 reference works. There is study space for 10 people, small AV and micro materials rooms and an environment controlled archives vault. Students either mail or phone in their requests for library materials and these are sent out within 24 hours if they are available for loan. Students studying French may borrow special language lab tape recorders. Records, audio and video cassettes are also available on loan for course work. The library staff not only circulates books and other materials but also provides reference services for staff and students, either by phone or on-site. On-line searching is provided but is done mainly for staff.

The library facility and the library services provided in Athabasca are quite different from those provided when the University was in Edmonton. In the next section I will

look at how this change in direction occurred and examine the reasons why I believe the major upheaval of relocation assisted the change and has given the library new incentive to become even more active in providing better library service to staff and students.

II. a. INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

The decision of the Government of Alberta to relocate Athabasca University to the town of Athabasca was greeted with skepticism by some and outrage by others on the university staff. For the Governing Council and the senior administrator's of the University the immediate task was to study the implications of the move from Edmonton to Athabasca and to present the government with informed proposals for the physical facilities, staffing and technological needs related to the Athabasca location. For this purpose, the Governing Council established a Commission on Relocation Planning at its 22nd meeting on 31 March, 1980. The mandate of the Commission was to determine "the problems of implementing the Government's decision and analyse their consequences, both positive and negative, for the University's operations". The Commission was also expected to consider alternatives to the existing modes of operation which might be necessary to overcome problems of operating from the Athabasca location. Some of the specific issues of concern were the consequences of the relocation for university staff including social, economic and career consequences; the physical facility requirements for both the operational and personnel functions; the integration of the University into Athabasca town planning; the possibility of using new technologies for the university operations in course design, production and delivery, library and computing services, media services and administrative functions. Last but certainly not least was the necessity to establish the costs involved in the move and to present the government with requests for special funding to cover these costs.

The Commission on Relocation Planning set about its work with a good will and produced a series of papers on the many areas of concern to the University community. Representations were made to the provincial government for funding to cover specific aspects of relocation. The results of the Commission's efforts were significant both in terms of the proposals made to facilitate the move to Athabasca and in the government's response with the

necessary funding. Funding was received to build a University facility; to assist staff to relocate to Athabasca, to step up recruitment to positions vacated by staff who did not relocate; to enhance the computer capability of the university. More particularly, special funding was also received to improve the library resources in the new location. The rest of the discussion in this paper will concentrate on the effect of the move and the special grants on the library operation.

Institutional planning for relocation did not end with the presentation of the Commission's studies and the receipt of the special funds to facilitate relocation. The second stage of institutional planning involved the establishment of a Physical Facilities Committee which had responsibility for coordinating the space needs of the units within the architectural design of the new building and the actual move of the various units to the new facility. A major move of this type is disruptive enough in the normal educational institution but at least the students in such institutions can see for themselves that any slow-down in service is justified temporarily. In a distance education institution where the main communication link is by telephone, disruptions of service caused by a major physical move are not readily apparent to the student. Furthermore, disruption of services to distance education students can have a more permanent effect than in the traditional setting because the student at a distance needs those support services to sustain his commitment to course completion. With this in mind, every effort was made to carry out the actual move with as little disruption of service as possible.

The move was made in stages. One or two departments were moved, the personnel were set up in the new quarters and the communications links (telephone and computer) were put in place. After a month, the next group would be moved. This process took about nine months.

The library was the second last department to be moved and its removal was more protracted because of the necessity to pack the book collection. Library service was provided up to the week before the move. At that point, we still accepted telephone and mail requests for material but informed students they would have to wait for about two weeks to receive the material. The assumption was that it would take one week to pack and move and another week to unpack in the new location. What we didn't calculate in this assumption was the delay in delivery of the new shelving to Athabasca. In advance planning, the shelving

was to have arrived and been set-up two weeks before the move. A lot of things did not happen according to the advance plan not least of which were that the library rugs were being laid two days before the move and the shelving arrived the same weekend as the move. When the library staff arrived in Athabasca on Monday morning after the move to unpack book boxes, they had to wait until the shelves were set-up. Two weeks suspended service stretched into a third week while the public services staff became edgy with the backlog of requests they had on hand. Finally, a week and a half after the move to Athabasca we were able to clean-up the request backlog and to begin regular services including the acceptance of telephone requests and mailing out of material within 24 hours of receipt of the requests.

At the time these delays were a public services nightmare, yet in retrospect they did not affect student use of the library at all. Once we were able to resume our regular telephone service, the students' use of the library returned to a normal level. The group which was most affected in a negative way by the library move was the faculty. Their use of the library dropped off significantly for the first three months after the move to Athabasca. However, I attribute this to the delays we had in recruiting professional and para-professional staff rather than to the disruptions of the move. I will deal with this in more detail below.

On the whole, the advance planning for the actual move of the institution to Athabasca was excellent. The delays and hitches were relatively minor and each department was able to re-establish its services and routines fairly quickly in the new location. Except for the delay in delivery of the shelving, the library move went smoothly with all functions operating relatively efficiently within two weeks of the move.

II. b. GOVERNMENT GRANT

As mentioned above, in 1979 a Task Force on the library was struck to report on the future development of the library. While the Task Force was writing its final report, the Government of Alberta announced the relocation of the university to the town of Athabasca. The members of the Task Force did not feel they could address the new situation of the library located in Athabasca so presented their recommendations for implementation in the Edmonton location only. A separate report was presented to the Commission on Relocation Planning which addressed the

problem of library service from the Athabasca location.

The major recommendation in this second report was that Athabasca University should develop a library collection in Athabasca that would include those items found in the reference and circulating collections of a typical undergraduate library. Using the standards suggested by the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (C.A.C.U.L.) it was estimated that the library would have to grow to 250,000 volumes. In order to build the collection from 15,000 items to 250,000 items in five years there would need to be a major infusion of capital and a significant increase in acquisitions, cataloguing and processing. Furthermore, it was recommended that some automation would be necessary to accomplish the task of building up a collection of that size in such a short time.

The original estimate of the size of collection needed was eventually scaled down to 125,000 volumes based on the realities of the use of the library by distance students and the realities of what could be accomplished in five years. Using that figure it was calculated that $5 million would be needed over five years to cover the costs of buying the materials, of hiring extra staff to handle the influx of material and for implementing automated procedures in technical services. A request was made to the provincial government for the necessary funding and the full $5 million was granted, to be paid out in equal installments over four years. The first installment was received in 1983/84 and set in motion the special Library Development Project.

The provision of this generous government grant settled, once and for all, the future direction of the library operation in Athabasca. There would be a basic undergraduate collection to serve the needs of students and faculty for course purposes, a reference collection adequate enough to answer most reference queries and an increase in the library resources related to research in distance and innovative education. All of these are the necessary basis of a much more pro-active library service for the students and faculty of Athabasca University. Without the special government grant, collection building would not have been possible.

II. c. AUTOMATED PROCEDURES

A library which functions as a facilitator between its users and other information sources and restricts its own

acquisition policy is a library with a small staff. Between 1975/76 and 1980/81, the library staff at Athabasca University grew from 1 to 2 professionals and from 4 to 5.5 support staff. In the same period circulation increased from 2,380 items to 6,700 items. It was recognized quite early in the relocation planning that a major project undertaken to increase the size of the library from 15,000 to 125,000 items in 5 years would require a substantial increase in staff. However, the increase in staff alone would not be enough without the introduction of automated procedures as well for acquisitions and cataloguing. The first step in automation was to link up with the UTLAS bibliographic utility. Using UTLAS catalogue copy, the records of the existing collection were converted to machine readable form and added to UTLAS records. New materials are automatically added to the UTLAS data base and labels for the book cards, pockets and spines are one of the products generated. A COMCAT is produced for library and borrower use and currently distributed to 35 locations, mainly to cooperating institutions and other academic libraries in Alberta.

The next step in automation was the linking of the UTLAS verification process with acquisitions through UTLAS ACCORD. This process allows us to order materials on-line from those publishers and jobbers which are connected electronically to ACCORD, thus eliminating much of the manual clerical work associated with ordering materials. ACCORD was installed about 6 months after the library development project was underway.

The last step in automating technical services was the installation of an accounting and statistical package. Selected for this purpose was Innovative Interfaces INNOVACQ system. The automatic downloading of order information to INNOVACQ provides us with a day by day balance sheet, if desired, of encumbered, expended and unexpended funds. Furthermore, it provides us with statistical data at year-end which will, over the life of the Library Development Project, provide an excellent map of the expenditure of funds in the project.

The installation of INNOVACQ took place in Edmonton just one month prior to the move to Athabasca. All the initial training on INNOVACQ (short as it was) was given to staff who would not be relocating to Athabasca. The change-over period between the trained staff in Edmonton to the completely new staff in Athabasca was handled by giving contracts to two members of the staff in Edmonton to work in Athabasca for six weeks. This allowed us to get over

the hump of training the new staff but we discovered a few months later that the training and practise on INNOVACQ had been too short in Edmonton and that our use of INNOVACQ was faulty. The problems were not irreversible, due in large part to the intelligence of the new acquisitions supervisor but further training was required for the Acquisitions Supervisor and the Head of Technical Services five months after the move to Athabasca.

Without the automated functions in technical services it would be virtually impossible for us to handle our current volume of acquisitions and cataloguing. With 5 acquisitions support staff and 6 cataloguing and processing staff, we have acquired and catalogued 20,000 items this year and have a backlog of only about 1,000 items. We have been forced to find every possible shortcut that automation provides. But the automation of technical services is also important because it allows us more easily to take the next major step of installing an automated public inquiry catalogue and circulation system. It is this next step that I believe will open the way for more interactive library service to our students.

II. d. NEW STAFF

As mentioned earlier, the library staff in 1980/81 was small in numbers - only 2 professionals and 5.5 support staff. A third professional was added in 1982. To handle the volume of materials to be acquired with the special library development grant it was necessary to hire more staff. The original plan was to establish a bibliocentre in Edmonton staffed with people on term appointments and to keep the bibliocentre in Edmonton after the library was moved to Athabasca. With this in mind, 11 term positions were established and the bibliocentre began operating about one year before the move. After the establishment of the bibliocentre the decision to keep it in Edmonton was reversed and all the staff complement was relocated to Athabasca. This decision had an important impact on the library operation in Athabasca.

One of the greatest problems faced by the university in its move to Athabasca was the loss of experienced staff members and the recruitment of suitable replacements. The recruitment problems were most acute for professional and para-professional positions. Support staff positions of a basically clerical nature were recruited from the town of Athabasca but the small size of the town meant a small professional pool to draw on and a sometimes negative

factor in recruiting new professionals from elsewhere.

The extent of loss of staff in relocation varied from department to department in the university but one of the hardest hit departments was the library. The staff members of the bibliocentre who had expected to stay in Edmonton naturally chose not to relocate. Of 21 staff members, only one long-term employee, the library secretary, relocated. Two other employees with less than one year of service also relocated. The move of the library to Athabasca was set for October but the recruitment of replacements for the University Librarian and Head, Technical Services began only in July. Thus, as the new University Librarian, I began work on September 1, the Head, Technical Services on September 12, the Copyright Officer on September 15. Two key people in public services did not resign until September so recruitment could not even begin until after the move to Athabasca. Almost all support staff positions were filled in mid-September and the new staff had only one week in Edmonton with the old staff "learning" the routines before the start-up of operations in Athabasca. Furthermore, none of the new recruits had library experience beyond the local high school or public library. As mentioned before, we managed not to fall into total chaos by offering short-term contracts to two or three of the Edmonton staff to come to Athabasca and help in the training of the new staff. Also I leaned heavily on the library secretary to keep most office matters in good order and to provide explanations for the interactions with the other departments.

On the face of it, a completely new, almost untrained staff would seem to be a prescription for disaster. That was, thankfully, not the case and I attribute that to the spirit of determination of all the new staff to make the thing work. The support staff members in technical services were all keen to learn the automated procedures and because they had practically no experience with manual library systems there was no resistance to the short-cuts identified by the Head of Technical Services.

The Public Services staff had more difficulty getting themselves organized but that was because of the delay in recriting professional staff. A term position of Reference and Collections Development librarian was recruited in January but the Head, Public Services position was not filled until 9 months after relocation. Once a professional staff member was available to give some direction to the public services staff they too soon became a smooth functioning unit.

III. NEW SERVICES/TECHNOLOGY

Relocation, with all its attendant planning, moving and restructuring is interesting enough for study on its own. Nevertheless, the intent in this paper is to go one step beyond that analysis to show how relocation actuually changed the nature of the library and has provided us with the opportunity of moving forward to better service to our students.

The two major changes which will affect the service to our students are the development of the basic undergraduate collection and the implementation of automated procedures. The building of an undergraduate collection was intended principally to assist faculty in the development of course material. It had the added value of giving substance to the policy of being the first source of course related material for our students wherever they were located in Canada. The potential in the larger collection, however, goes much beyond that. The reference collection provides us with a base for extending the reference enquiry service to students. We have engaged in a publicity campaign through the university publications to encourage more student use of the library. Beyond these activities we now have faculty members developing courses with open-ended essay topics that will require the student to seek more information from the library. The faculty feel confident in moving in this direction because of the collection and the library staff support.

The next major project for the public services staff will be the development of bibliographic instruction to help our students make better use of this and any other library. Three methods of delivery are being considered. The first method is participation in study skills workshops presented by Student Services. The second method is through print material sent out in course packages. The third method is through video presentation. It is quite possible that the second and third methods might be combined. The point is that a better collection, new location and new staff have all helped to reorient the library to more pro-active service to students.

The implementation of automated procedures in technical services would not appear to have much bearing on public service. Nevertheless, it has provided us with the impetus to move to the next phase of automation - the installation of an on-line public catalogue and circulation

system. Without the need generated by relocation and the library development funding, it is debateable that automation would have advanced as quickly as it has in the Athabasca University Library. As it is, we are now in the first stage of acquiring automation for the public services functions. I feel this will be a major breakthrough for student use of our library if access to the on-line catalogue is widely available through the regional offices, cooperating institutions and dial-up procedures.

IV CONCLUSION

The theories of organizational change define stages or processes that an organization goes through in effecting change. Buckley and Perkins (1984) suggest a seven-stage model for transformative change while Schaller (1978) gives five steps and Beckhard and Harris (1977) identify six aspects of the change process. The stages common to all of these theories are:

1) Thinking about change

2) Decision to change

3) Planning for change

4) Effecting the change

5) Evaluation/Consolidation of change

It is probably a moot point whether relocating a whole institution falls into the theoretical perspective of organizational change. Certainly, in the case of AU the decision to change, or relocate, represents an aberration from the theoretical perspective. The assumption in the theories is that the decision to change comes from within the organization but for AU, while the University was desirous of a permanent location, the decision to relocate to Athabasca was imposed from outside the organization. Nevertheless, once that initial decision was taken the next steps were followed through by the University.

In the above analysis I have indicated how the advance planning for relocation assured a successful move and that effecting the change was not too traumatic due to the advance planning. However, I have gone farther than that to show that three other factors, resources, technology and staff contributed to effecting successful change. More importantly, it is my belief that those three factors have contributed to change in the library and its services which go quite beyond that intended in the initial planning.

Those three factors have set the stage, so to speak, for the library to become more active in offering its services to students. In so doing, I believe we are setting a whole new pattern in library service to distance education students.

What began at Athabasca University as an exercise in physical change or relocation has resulted, through the various decisions taken, in an even more dramatic transformation. Athabasca University has come of age and with it the library also has come of age. We look forward to the challenges now opening up to us for providing better library service to our students and faculty.

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